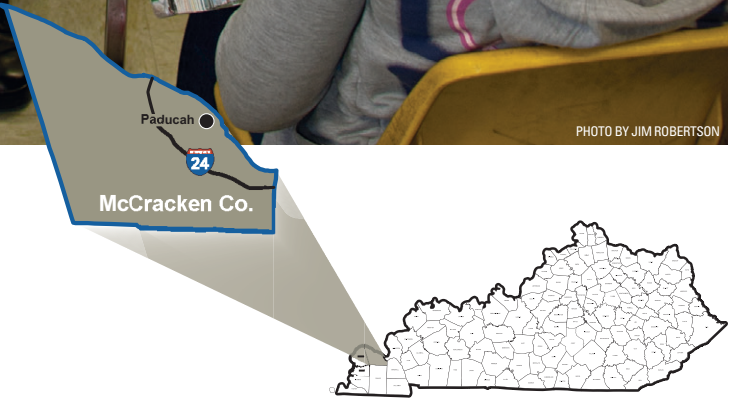


Paducah Officer  
Travis Counts

KELLY FOREMAN | PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER



Being the community relations go-to guy in a police department can sometimes be cumbersome and overwhelming, but Paducah Police Officer Travis Counts takes it in stride. After 12 years with the agency, he has participated in nearly every community function the agency has to offer — and even come up with a few of his own.

Counts, 38, is enthusiastic about his work with the community, especially when it comes to the kids. Father to Avie, 9, Gabriel, 8, and Alyssa, 1, he emphasizes the importance of working with children to build a better future for them, and for the community they eventually will lead.

**I’ve been an officer with Paducah since 2001.** I am actually from Aurora, Illinois, which is a suburb of Chicago. I went into the military and they paid for me to go to college, so I went to Southern Illinois University. I met and married a girl from this area and we moved here. That’s the short story.

**I have a classical history degree.** It’s a little bit different. I was going to go back into the military after college and finish a 20-year career there, so I studied with an emphasis on historical warfare. I had a plan — then marriage changed it. Actually, this has turned out better. I didn’t have to go through war, I have had more stability, and I didn’t have to live on a ship full of men anymore.

**I was in the Navy.** I spent two years on active duty, they sent me to school for four years where I was in active reserve and then I spent about another two years in active reserve. I was on a Guided Missile-Frigate, FFG-15, which was the “Estocin,” and FFG-22, which was the “Fahrion,” in the Caribbean. I was a Caribbean cruiser, from Bermuda to the Bahamas. I know, twist my arm, twist my arm.

**I have been working with the GREAT program** for almost eight years now. I am a patrolman, so this is just collateral duty. There was an opening and I applied. I went into it because I knew I could work well with the community, I had a good rapport with the kids, and I did a little bit of teaching as a substitute before I got hired here at Paducah. So, I knew the rules of the classroom going in and it was just something that interested me as a way I could give back to the community.

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**We have several gangs in Paducah.** Some of them are startups of their own, like the Broad Street Boys. They started as a group of kids hanging out, then they started breaking into places. They were more of the fledgling gang that just exploded. We have some other gangs, too, like the Gangster Disciples and Latin Kings that have moved into the area. We have street gangs, but they are very low activity here.

**The program is not just about gangs.** In the 13-week course, there are discussions about gangs, drugs, crimes and violence as well as communication, decision making, how to set a goal, how to achieve that goal, how to resolve problems, conflict resolution and how to get along without going along.

**In a way, you’re teaching common sense,** but to kids who are in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, they don’t understand things like decision making — how making a bad decision can ruin the rest of your life. We explain both sides, that there are good decisions and bad decisions. That there is a difference between listening and actively listening — communication skills. The thing I think is best about the program is that in order for the kids to successfully complete it, they have to complete a community project where they improve something in their school.

**Since I started working here, I have been involved** in all of our community relations. A lot of people have learned to call on me and say, ‘He can do it.’

**When I was working the flex shift, the Anderson Court** apartment housing complex was in one of my patrol areas. I got to know a few of the residents, and in talking to them, I heard a lot of them say they felt left out, or they didn’t feel like they could mix with some of the other programs, because some of the residents

were of lower incomes. So I said, ‘Well how about we just have a little picnic?’ We went door-to-door to all the residents and told them about it after it was approved by the property manager. I went out and bought a bunch of stuff for charcoal grills, some hot dogs and potato chips, called out the Red Cross, the fire department and NECCO (a private family services assistance group), and let them set up booths. Some of the residents came out and helped cook and we all helped clean up. They got to meet and talk to police officers and everybody, the kids got to play and it was just a good time for everyone.

**It was the only way I could think of to have a community event** where the residents were the main focus. I wanted to make a difference and let them know, no one is going to do drugs out here. If someone is going to commit a crime, at least they are going to know the face who is arresting them. The better thing is they have a face to come to when they need to solve the problem at the beginning, before it leads to something where we have to take enforcement action. And we have a low call volume there.

**The most difficult part of this job is thinking about leaving.** I can retire in eight years, and I don’t think I’m going to be ready. This is a very close-knit job, and once you leave the policing community, you’re not in it anymore. Leaving is going to be a very difficult decision. I don’t want to do what a lot of people do and retire, then they regret it. I don’t want to live my life with any regrets. You start to realize, ‘Wait, I have had so much fun doing this, and it’s almost over.’ Now that I’m seeing the finish line, it’s starting to get a little — I’ll say it — it gets a little scary. 🏠

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